

FIRST PHASE OF VERDUN BATTLE ENDS; 100,000 DEAD PRICE OF GERMAN GAINS

Attacks on North Checked,
French Now Await Big
Drive From East.

WAR'S FIERCEST FIGHT

Special Cable Despatch to The Sun.

PARIS, March 2 (delayed).—History alone will tell the full tale of the battle of Verdun, but it is now possible to give a fairly complete account of the first phase of this titanic conflict which ended on February 22, two days ago, with the repulse of the Germans from the Douaumont plateau, four miles north of Verdun. Military men here expect a resumption of the offensive southwest of Verdun, with perhaps a supplementary attack from the northwest along the west bank of the Meuse. The assault from the north, judging from all information at hand at this time, has failed.

The first phase of the battle began on February 21 and lasted ten days. In that time, according to the German statements, which have just been received here from London, the enemy captured about 17,000 prisoners, 76 cannon and 36 machine guns. The Germans gained territory north of Verdun to a depth of about five miles, while they captured about the same area on the Woëvre plain, east of Verdun. This is considerably more territory than the French gained in Champagne last September, when the attack was made over a front of about twenty-five miles, but the French at that time took 25,000 prisoners and 216 guns, not including machine guns. The attack north of Verdun was made on a front of about six miles on a difficult, rocky plateau, which narrows in width to a mere bottle neck as it approaches the fortress.

German Losses Almost 150,000 Men.

As for losses, it is impossible at this time to give figures with any degree of accuracy, but all accounts of the battle given by wounded officers who have returned to Paris agree that the slaughter of the Germans was terrific. It is believed that 140,000 men engaged, they are believed to have lost close to 150,000, and nearly 100,000 of these were killed or so badly wounded that they died on the battlefield. For the first few days of the battle it was impossible to rescue the wounded owing to the intense and continuous artillery fire. A heavy snow and bitter cold added to their miseries.

The figures on French losses are now in the hands of the military committee of the Chamber of Deputies, but the censor will allow no estimates to be published. It is believed, however, that the censor will let it pass that about 200,000 French troops took part in the defense of the fortress. This is likely to be an overestimate, as it is known that the Germans had not captured any of the long battle line, intending to be prepared for any surprise which the Germans may be planning.

The German attack in the Valley of the Meuse, which on both sides with high hills. Those on the east, known as the Heights of the Meuse, are the most important. These heights consist of a long range of hills from 200 to 300 meters high which with the wide river, serve as a natural barrier to an attack from the east. Hence they are surrounded with such important defensive works as Verdun, Toul, Epinal and Belfort. This range of hills slopes in the east down to the Woëvre plain, which is widest on a line drawn from Frenoy east to the frontier. The plain extends to a width of about eight miles at Vigneulles, which is situated within the so-called St. Mihiel salient.

Douaumont Not a Fortress.

In the case of Fort Douaumont, the capture of which was the high mark of the German assault, it is not, as claimed by the Germans, a "well-armed fortress," which is the key position to the defenses of Verdun. The fort consists of a series of armored tunnels. There is a central turret, but it contains only machine guns and some small caliber cannon. All the big guns have been removed. At the most northerly point of the fort there is a heavily armored observation post. The importance of Douaumont lies in the fact that it guards the narrowest point in the high plateau leading down to Verdun from the north. The position has an altitude of 283 meters and is flanked on each side by deep ravines.

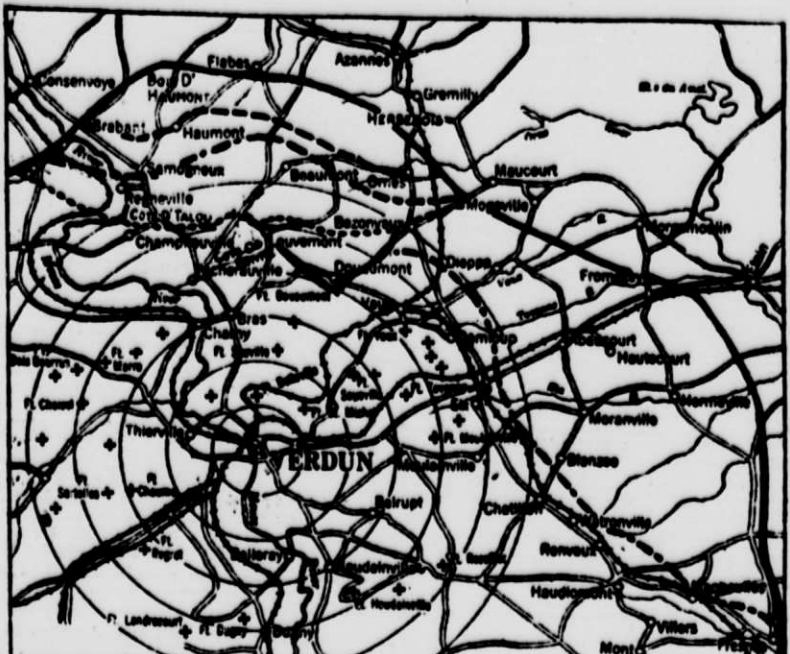
Putting together the various tales of wounded officers and viewing them in the light of the official German statement, the story of the battle is about as follows: The battle opened at 8:30 on the morning of February 21, with an intense artillery fire, which soon rendered untenable the first line French trenches, stretching from a point a short distance north of Brabant to L'Herbebois, a front of a little more than five miles. The Germans were pushed up in every direction by German shells of all calibers, while the barbed wire entanglements and machine guns were literally disappeared in clouds of smoke.

While the French withdrew to their second line trenches their artillery remained effectively to the German challenge, and was soon ordered to a gradual retirement, leaving strong rear guards to delay the German advance as much as possible.

The Germans on the same day delivered a heavy attack against the British lines in the neighborhood of Ypres and gained some ground. In the following day, February 22, they attacked in the Ypres district with effectives estimated at about 10,000 men, thinking in this way to throw the French off their guard and to where the principal attack was to be made. But since the early part of last December Gen. Joffre had kept his eye on the situation north of Verdun because active scouts had reported preparations for an offensive in that region and the massing of large numbers of troops.

German Gains Were Costly.

The first heavy German blow fell on February 22, when by massed attack after a most extraordinary artillery preparation, they penetrated the French front to a depth of about two miles from one point to the other of the village of



THE first phase of the Verdun battle is illustrated in the accompanying map. The solid black line shows the battle line before the beginning of the struggle on February 21, while the dotted lines show the successive advances of the Germans north of Verdun. East of the fortress the French retired to the base of the Meuse heights to keep their line intact.

Beaumont. During this attack the German artillery kept up a heavy bombardment over the entire front from Melancourt, on the west bank of the Meuse, to Etain, about halfway between Verdun and Metz, a distance of about twenty-five miles.

In these preliminary attacks the Germans, according to wounded officers who have returned from the front, employed about 200 cannon and several hundred machine guns. No sooner did the French seventy-five ton huge guns in this line than the Germans were filled up from the rear ranks. The method of advance, in which the Germans did like flies, continued despite the concentrated fire of the French batteries, which according to one participant in the battle fired literally to the inch.

Time and again the Germans ploughed through the storm of explosive shell and shrapnel until they were so close that the artillery of both sides had to cease firing. Then the French turned their machine guns on the onrushing mass of gray, cutting huge swaths in it. This did not stop them, however, as they had no use except as holders for bayonets, and in this way the French succeeded in temporarily stemming the Teuton tide. When such an assault failed, the German artillery began again its methodical preparation, and then the attack was renewed on a greater scale.

In these three days the Germans had gained more than two miles on either wing and a large number of prisoners. Some of the French defenders fought until they were overwhelmed, others were cut off in the retreat by a quick advance down a decline south of Samogneux known as the Nameless Ravine. The French forces defending Orvaux and Samogneux were cut off. The swollen condition of the Meuse prevented their retirement across the river and they fell into the hands of the enemy.

Sweeping southward, the German right wing on the following day, February 22, drove the French back across the Meuse peninsula, so called because of the loop in the river at this point, and hurried itself against the French positions on the Cote du Faubourg, a height lying just east of Champagnelle. The German attack was a surprise. The latest reports indicate that this height now lies between the opposing sides while to the east the Germans have pushed as far as the Cote du Faubourg, against which they have battered in vain for several days.

Brandenburgers Stormed Fort.

The crisis in the first phase of the battle came on February 22, when the Germans, heavily equipped, captured the hill southwest of Douaumont, in the face of a hurricane of artillery fire and pushed their lines as far south as the village of Vaux. The village, consisting of not more than fifty houses, situated at the intersection of three roads, stands on a plateau which is the narrowest point of the Meuse valley. The fort of Douaumont, which overlooks the village at a height of 101 meters (333 feet), commands the village as well as the approach along the road. A German detachment to the south and closer to Verdun, the forts of Saulville and Vaux command Douaumont.

After several unsuccessful attempts to take Fort Douaumont Count von Haezler, the German commander who made himself famous a few years by capturing the Kaiser in maneuvers, ordered the Brandenburg regiments forward. As they dashed up the steep slope the French machine guns on the crest rained a murderous fire upon them, cutting them down like wheat. The Brandenburgers, whose heads bent as if to protect them from the hail of lead, kept on and from this hill of death they were masters of the fort, or rather the ruins of what was once a fort, for the big German guns and batteries to the rear were French commander issued the order to launch a counter attack. It was led by a full army corps, one that made its name famous in Champagne but which was not allowed yet even to designate by number. Dashing up the hill the French instead of throwing themselves on the Germans sheltered in the ruins and were divided into two columns and swept around the position, retaking the village of Douaumont and thereby cutting off the Brandenburgers and their dearly loved guns on the spur above. Furious attacks were made by the Germans to relieve their comrades, but the French held their positions against every assault.

All reports from Verdun agree that the slaughter in this day's fighting was terrible. Every possible route of approach to the French positions was accompanied by artillery and machine gun fire, so that the Germans debouching from wood or ravine immediately became easy targets for the French guns.

Barred by Their Own Dead. So many were killed that they even clogged the streams in the ravines which seeped this plateau running in every direction. Finally the advancing Germans were able to barricade themselves behind the bodies of their own dead and in this way receive some protection.

During the night of February 22 and 23 the French General Staff decided upon a retirement from their advanced positions on the Woëvre plain. There were indications that Count von Haezler intended to attempt an assault on the French from this direction, and under cover of darkness the French fell back to the railway line that skirts the Meuse heights on the following day at the railway station of Elz, which changed hands several times, at Manheulles and at Fresnes. The Germans succeeded in taking the village of Manheulles, but were repulsed at Elz and Fresnes, the former position lying the closer to Verdun. South of Fresnes the Germans carried the village of Champeigne, and at last reports it still remains in their hands.

heights form at this point. Their losses have been enormous—greater, officers say, than in any battle of the war. The net result of this first phase of the battle has been a considerable gain in territory when compared with the gains in trench warfare, at an expenditure of ammunition that makes the battle of Champagne last September seem like a clash between diplomats.

Since the above description of the Verdun fighting was called, it has been announced in Paris that Gen. Philippe Petain is in immediate command of the defenders. The great battle thus is under the direction of veteran commanders, Count von Haezler, the adviser of the Crown Prince, being more than 70 years of age, while Gen. Petain is within a month of his sixtieth birthday. Gen. Petain is one of the most picturesque figures in the western campaign, having been in the thick of many actions since the beginning of the war. Despite his comparatively advanced age, he won recognition during the Charleroi retreat, and more recently in the Champagne fighting he proved his stamina by leading his men at double quick for two miles across heavy ground. As an illustration of his defiance of danger, he has changed his chauffeur four times in two months. During one prolonged action the seat of a machine gun automobile was his office and bedroom for a week.

AMERICANS IN FIGHT.

Edward Mouvette of New York Among the Wounded.

PARIS, March 1.—Eight of the Americans who joined the Foreign Legion at the beginning of the war are taking part in the fierce fighting north of Douaumont. Edward Mouvette of New York was one of several wounded. Others whose fate is unknown are Edmond Reager of New York, great-grandson of Gov. George Clinton; Alan Seeger of New York; H. L. Chattoff, Christopher Charles and Eugene Lanny of Brooklyn; Charles Phillips of Chicago and James Duhamelville of Boston.

The Americans have distinguished themselves in other engagements of the war and their names have been mentioned in numerous despatches recording the feats of the legion. They participated in the fighting last September which drove the Germans back in the Champagne country. At that time Alan Seeger and others were reported at first to have been killed.

Reager has been the special correspondent of THE SUN with the legion. He is a Harvard graduate of the class of 1910.

FRENCH BREAK GERMAN HOLD ON DOUAUMONT

Continued from First Page.

lowed by any action on the part of the enemy.

At Les Eparges we have prevented the enemy from occupying a crater produced by the explosion of one of our mines.

There is nothing to report from the remainder of the front excepting the customary almost silence. The second phase of the battle at Verdun has so far brought the Germans even less success than the first, according to the view of Paris experts. The Paris newspapers are all of the opinion that the attack on Verdun may be prolonged for another week or perhaps more, judging from the preparations of the enemy.

See Signs of Weakness.

The consensus is that the force which is driving the German battalions to the assault is born of weakness rather than confidence. "The soldiers whose corpses are heaped up in thousands," says one writer, "are dying not for victory but for advertisement in order that the German bourgeois may make up his mind to drain the whole of his coffers for the war loan."

The manner in which the situation at Verdun is handled by Gen. Petain and his staff recalls almost exactly the brilliant military conception of the defense of the Grand Couronne by Gen. de Castelnau, which saved Nancy and the French centre from being pierced at the most critical period at the beginning of the war, the newspapers say.

At that crisis, when things were looking very black, Gen. Castelnau by a stroke of original strategy withdrew his troops from the attack of the invaders to the heights of Anancourt and there for two weeks repelled the most desperate assaults.

Similar tactics have been employed with success at Verdun. Sent for at a moment's notice at midnight, Gen. Petain jumped into a motor car and drove at breakneck speed from Champagne to Verdun. There he took over the command without a moment's hesitation and within a couple of hours he had grasped

the situation and was issuing orders which stopped the German rush and kept the enemy at bay.

It is said that just before the supreme effort which regained the Douaumont plateau for the French, Gen. Petain, addressing his men, said, "Don't forget that Douaumont is Verdun and Verdun is France. I have confidence in you, my children."

One of the most dramatic incidents of the Verdun attack took place in underground quarries between Pepper Hill (the Cote du Poivre) and Louvemont (Wolf Hill), where a subterranean passage runs from the quarries used by the shelter for the French troops to the foot of the plateau. A German 12 inch shell landing on the roof of the gallery made a huge hole, disclosing a hidden passage to the enemy. A couple of companies went forward to attack the position. French sappers hurriedly threw up a barricade, behind which they placed a machine gun.

The Germans, unable to advance, endeavored to place a dynamite charge under the rocks and blow up the passage. A French Captain called for volunteers to go forward along the gallery and clear the Germans out with the bayonet. Twenty men responded and a fierce struggle took place in the darkness. The Germans summoned to their aid fire throwing apparatus, but they could not stop the onrush of the volunteers. A second force of fifty Frenchmen with a machine gun went to the assistance of their comrades and some fifteen minutes later the passage was cleared.

STILL HOLD FORT.

Brandenburgers Not Believed to Be Completely Isolated.

Special Cable Despatch to The Sun.

PARIS, March 4.—The situation at Fort Douaumont is not clear. A remnant of Brandenburgers, now estimated at between 400 and 500 men, still occupy the fort, having been practically surrounded for a week. Nevertheless, it is believed that they maintain contact with the German advanced position hidden in the wooded land by an underground passage or a ruined trench, and thus are able to get food.

It is stated that the French could capture the fort if they sacrificed enough men, but this would not be justified. Full confidence is felt here and in France generally in the French ability to with-

stand a renewed attack. The French troops are deriving full profit from their resources and hold an infinitely stronger line than formerly.

Speaking before the French Chamber of Deputies today, Gen. Gallieni, Minister of War, said he was satisfied with the situation at Verdun. He gave to the Chamber information regarding the reserves of men and munitions still available.

It is recognized generally by the French military critics that the Germans were bound to attempt to reduce the Douaumont salient before seeking to advance elsewhere on this front. In conformity with this scheme there was a long artillery bombardment on Wednesday, followed by infantry attacks from the Hardaumont wood, on the right, and on the village of Vaux. The results of the first have already been announced; the Vaux attack failed with heavy losses for the attacking forces. Details from this front continue to come in from men who have taken part in the action.

A German prisoner, a member of the Tenth Company of the Twelfth Regiment, made the following statement: "On February 21, before my company had taken part in any engagement, it was composed of 200 men and twenty-four officers. The organization came out of battle reduced to one officer and seventy men. It is a miracle that any of us escaped the massacre. The French artillery fire and the marksmanship of the French infantry made equally heavy ravages in the ranks of almost all the other companies of my regiment."

Another account of the fighting is given by a French captain of chasseurs who took active part in the defense of Douaumont on March 2. He said: "I want to say that our antagonist showed tenacious bravery, but notwithstanding the courage of the enemy the French chasseurs once again lived up to their reputation. They went into the night and a veritable slaughter of the enemy was the result. There were stacks of the enemy dead right up against our barbed wire entanglements. Fierce fighting at close quarters, and in some places hand to hand engagements, gave us at some points the advantage. Nevertheless the Germans came back to the charge again with fresh companies of men."

BATTLE DECISIVE.

"Temps" Critic Says German Fall-ure Will Be Vital.

Special Cable Despatch to The Sun.

PARIS, March 4.—The military critic of the Temps ventures the opinion that

the Germans will be checked in the end around Verdun.

In an article today on the symptoms of German failure he remarks: "The Germans know how to push the attack to the furthest limit, but it is not worth the cost in this instance, for if we lose Verdun it will only be one unfortunate episode in a long and cruel war. The final result will not be changed thereby. But if the Germans fail to break our front it will mean for them a preliminary failure in the final decisive phase of the war. It will spell their ultimate defeat. From the present battle we will learn the measure and extent of German exhaustion."

The extent of the preparations made for the capture of Verdun are revealed by L'Eclair, which asserts that every day during the first week of the bombardment the Germans expended more than 400,000 projectiles. The total fired now exceeds 2,000,000.

Marcel Huin writes in the Echo de Paris: "One calculates the strategic result of the German offensive of the past two days in comparison with that of the first four days, an impression of confidence and security fills the heart. An advance of about four miles marked the enemy's progress during the first period on a front of about 6½ miles, for the withdrawal in the Woëvre was our own doing and was not due to them, while a temporary gain of between 300 and 400 yards constituted in all for all the result of the last two days of the battle north of Verdun."

"Let us sum up the situation. We are holding our ground firmly everywhere against what is evidently a resumption of the main attack by the Crown Prince on Verdun. We are witnessing a general battle in which Douaumont figures merely as a name."

"At the same time the reflection is suggested to us by this seeming localization of the struggle to the south of Douaumont, where we admit the Roches are still holding, but at the price of terrible losses, the heap of stones, which the place must now be and from which they cannot debouch for the moment, that the situation has developed into a succession of attacks and counter attacks. To-morrow, perhaps, we may again be masters of the ruins of Douaumont. The Germans yesterday directed their attacks on Douaumont. To-morrow it will be elsewhere; the day after that it will be Douaumont again. They are seeking to strike repeated blows in diverse localities. It is an engagement in tactics which proceeds normally. The progress of the enemy up to yesterday was equivalent to almost nothing. It is using up both sides and the question is which is suffering the more."

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also Navy or Black Serge. Special 39.50

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The new "Jenny" model of Men's Wear Serge, in Navy,
Black or Rookie, with continuous row of buttons and
button holes. Special 39.50

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Showing latest Spring Suits, including six new "Cross Coun-
try" and "Country Club" models, in Callot or shepherd
checks, men's wear serge, overplaids, homespun
or mannish fabrics; also the new silk fabrics.

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Misses' Three Piece Suits

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Of Men's Wear Serge, in Navy, Copen, Rookie, also
Black and White Check Worsteds, three-quarter length
belted box coat; flare skirt, 14 to 20 years. Special 29.50

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Of white washable kid; also sand, pearl, Havana or
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party wear of taffeta silk, Georgette crepe, silk mer-
veilleux, radium silk, crepe de Chine, charmeuse;
also chiffon, nets and laces.

18.50 to 98.50

Special for Monday

Misses' Taffeta Dresses

Hand Embroidered Bodice and Tails

In Navy, Rose, Hague Blue, Gray, Brown or Black, hand
embroidered in gold and self-color Georgette crepe
sleeves. 14 to 20 years. Special 18.50

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